

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2107

As Reported by House Committee On:
Higher Education

Title: An act relating to a statewide student association.

Brief Description: Authorizing a statewide student association.

Sponsors: Representatives Kenney, Cox, Ormsby, Rodne, Williams, Upthegrove and McDermott.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Higher Education: 2/25/05, 3/1/05 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the Higher Education Coordinating Board to conduct a study of statewide student associations representing students at public four-year institutions of higher education and report to the Legislature on alternative models for Washington by December 1, 2005.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 12 members: Representatives Kenney, Chair; Sells, Vice Chair; Cox, Ranking Minority Member; Rodne, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Buri, Fromhold, Hasegawa, Jarrett, Ormsby, Priest, Roberts and Sommers.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 1 member: Representative Dunn.

Staff: Barbara McLain (786-7383).

Background:

The Washington Student Lobby (WSL) is a non-profit organization that advocates for and lobbies government organizations on behalf of students attending the state's public four-year institutions. The student government associations at the public four-year institutions are voluntarily affiliated with the WSL. Each campus association has two representatives on the WSL Board of Directors, and there is one representative each from the graduate students of Washington State University and the University of Washington.

At some institutions, students can choose to contribute a fee to support the activities of the WSL. The fee ranges from \$2 to \$4 per quarter or semester. At the University of Washington, the student government sends a contribution out of its budget. The total annual budget for the WSL is approximately \$25,000.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB) will conduct a study of statewide student associations representing students at public four-year institutions of higher education. The study includes role and mission, funding mechanisms, activities and budget, oversight and accountability, and governance. In conducting the study, the HECB will work with representatives of the WSL, campus student government associations, and four-year institutions. A report with alternative models for how Washington students could be represented is due December 1, 2005.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

Rather than recognizing one statewide student association and approving a mandatory fee paid by all students unless they choose not to be members of the association, the HECB will conduct a study that includes examination of role and mission, funding mechanisms, oversight and accountability, and other issues pertaining to a statewide student association.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: (In support of original bill) The WSL is not currently financially sustainable or healthy. The current funding mechanism results in widely varying and unpredictable amounts of financial support. The bill would not replace individual student lobbyists from each institution, but financial support would enable the organization to hire an executive director and some research staff to provide an ongoing presence in Olympia and more outreach and educational activities on campus. An opt-out fee rather than an opt-in fee is important to secure adequate funding. It is not possible to build a sustainable organization if the entire student government can simply opt-out. Students make real contributions to the public policy debate, particularly about tuition, financial aid, child care, and academic standards. When the Legislature is not in session, it is difficult to access that voice.

(Concerns with original bill) If the campus student government disagrees with the overall direction of the statewide organization, it should have an opportunity to opt-out just as individual students can. It is important to have a strong and stable student lobby, but this imposes an external fee outside the normal process for approval of student fees. Fees are

established by the Boards of Regents and Trustees with much student input, not externally by the HECB. A very large amount of money would be generated by a \$2 fee on every student. The fee should operate as an opt-in rather than an opt-out.

Testimony Against: None.

Persons Testifying: (In support of original bill) Jamie Corning, Associated Students of the University of Washington; Nicholas Cizek, Associated Students of Western Washington University; Brady Horenstein, Associated Students of Washington State University; Bruce Botka, Higher Education Coordinating Board; and Brad Bishop, student at The Evergreen State College.

(Concerns with original bill) Jeff Gombosky, Eastern Washington University; Randy Hodgins, University of Washington; and Judy McNickle, Western Washington University.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.